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DAVID LENT/LISBON

PORTUGAL'S PLURALISTIC VOTE

ANNCR:

NOW THAT PORTUGAL HAS HELD ITS FIRST OPEN LEGISLATIVE ELECTION IN FIFTY YEARS, VOA CORRESPONDENT DAVID LENT IN LISBON HAS THESE OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE RESULTS.

VOICE:

PORTUGUESE VOTERS DID NOT DELIVER A DEFINITIVE VICTORY TO ANY ONE PARTY, BUT THEY DELIVERED JUST SUCH A VICTORY TO THEMSELVES. THEY DECLARED IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS THAT THEY FAVOR PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY.

IT'S ALL TOO EASY TO LOSE SIGHT OF THIS FACT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE ELECTION. THERE WAS NOTHING CLEAR AND DECISIVE ABOUT THE ELECTION RESULTS. THE SOCIALISTS GOT A PLURALITY BUT NOT A MAJORITY. THE CONSERVATIVE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC CENTER PARTY DOUBLED ITS STRENGTH. THE POPULAR DEMOCRATS LOST STRENGTH BUT REMAINED THE SECOND STRONGEST PARTY. EVEN THE COMMUNISTS, WHO HAVE THE DUBIOUS DISTINCTION OF BEING THE MOST STALINIST OF WEST EUROPE'S COMMUNIST PARTIES, HAVE REASON FOR SATISFACTION. THEY INCREASED THEIR OVERALL STRENGTH MARGINALLY AND CONSOLIDATED THEIR POSITION IN LISBON'S INDUSTRIAL BELT AND AMONG MIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN THE SOUTH. BUT IT IS MORE SIGNIFICANT TO REALIZE THAT WESTERN, PLURALISTIC DEMOCRACY WAS THE HEALTHY BABY BORN IN SUNDAY'S POLLING. SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF PORTUGAL'S VOTERS ENDORSED DEMOCRACY -- ONLY A MINORITY AND A SMALL MINORITY AT THAT -- ENDORSED THE IDEA OF A DICTATORSHIP OF THE LEFT.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT THE ELECTIONS TOOK PLACE ONLY FIVE MONTHS AFTER A SMALL LEFTIST CLIQUE IN PORTUGAL'S ARMED FORCES TRIED AND FAILED TO IMPOSE A DICTATORSHIP OF THE PROLETARIAT ON PORTUGAL. LAST NOVEMBER'S ABORTIVE COUP D'ETAT WAS A TURNING POINT IN PORTUGAL'S TWO YEARS OF REVOLUTIONARY TURMOIL FOLLOWING THE OVERTHROW OF NEARLY FIVE YEARS OF RIGHT-WING DICTATORSHIP. SINCE THEN, MODERATE FORCES, FAVORING A PLURALISTIC SYSTEM SIMILAR TO THAT PREVAILING THROUGHOUT WESTERN EUROPE, HAVE COME TO THE FORE, AND THE PEOPLE RESPONDED WITH THEIR OVERWHELMING VOTE ON SUNDAY.

THE OUTCOME OF SUNDAY'S ELECTION LACKS THE ORDERLINESS IT MIGHT HAVE HAD. PORTUGAL FACES A PERIOD OF INTENSE MANEUVERING AS POLITICAL FORCES SEEK A FORMULA UPON WHICH TO BASE THE GOVERNMENT. THE SITUATION LACKS THE CLARITY THAT TOTALITARIANS OF LEFT AND RIGHT FIND COMFORTABLE. BUT THE DISORDER HAS A BEAUTY OF ITS OWN. BEFORE OUR EYES, AN ESSENTIALLY PLURALISTIC SOCIETY HAS REGISTERED ITS PREFERENCES AND HAS ENDORSED THE IDEA OF MAJORITY RULE. PORTUGAL AND ITS FRIENDS HAVE WON A VICTORY.

GH/RCS